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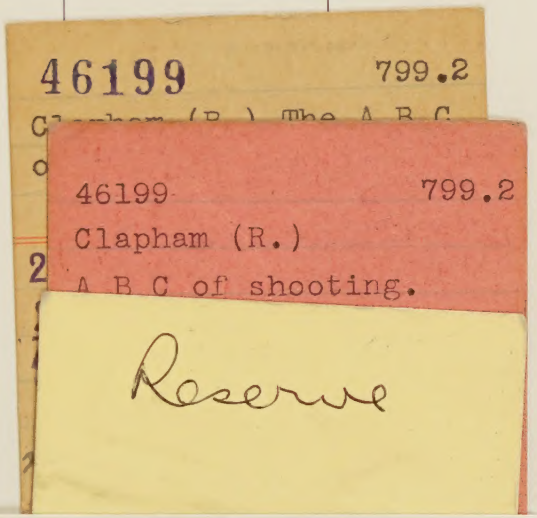

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THE ABC OF SHOOTING

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MELANISTIC MUTANT PHEASANT

THE ABC OF SHOOTING

SOME HINTS FOR BEGINNERS

BY
RICHARD CLAPHAM
AUTHOR OF "ROUGH SHOOTING," ETC.

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FOREWORD

Not so very long ago, when the majority of country estates were still intact, a boy was entered to shooting as soon as he could hold a gun. From that red-letter day when, in charge of the old gamekeeper, he killed his first rabbit, he gradually became proficient as a shot, and acquired a knowledge of the ways of birds and beasts. As he grew older, this knowledge added greatly to the pleasure of his days afield, for the sport of shooting—to enjoy it properly—does not solely consist of skill with the gun.

Since then times have changed. Country estates have been broken up, and the boy of to-day very often takes his first lesson with the gun at a shooting-school. After graduating there

as a shot, he then takes part in regular shooting days with his elders. Having little or no experience of woodcraft, because he has never hunted for game but always had it driven to him, he is apt to look upon shooting as a test of marksmanship with a competitive element about it, instead of—as he should do—a real field sport. This applies to the older novice as well as the boy, for to-day many people take up shooting late in life.

The real joy of shooting does not consist in loosing off so many cartridges per day, but in understanding the ways of birds and beasts and the woodcraft necessary to bring them to bag. Shooting is a field sport, not a pastime. Clay pigeons will suffice you as a test of marksmanship.

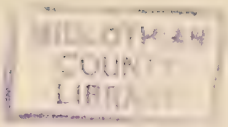
A real love of shooting embraces so much that some people can never understand. Sun and cloud, grasses waving in the breeze, bees amongst purple heather, a glimpse of a rare animal or bird, all add to the pleasure of a day with the gun.

FOREWORD

In the following chapters I have endeavoured to cover the sport of shooting from a beginner's point of view, and hope that they may interest if they do not instruct the novice who is on the threshold of his, or her, shooting career.

CHAPTER I

BUYING A GUN



CHAPTER I

BUYING A GUN

When purchasing a gun it is sound policy to buy the best you can afford. A really well-made weapon will last you a lifetime if you look after it properly. Go to a firm of repute, pay a good price, and you will get your money's worth.

Balance and fit are all important in a gun if you hope to shoot well with it. Nowadays there is no excuse for taking the field with an ill-fitting gun. Visit one of the shooting-schools where a try-gun is provided which will register your individual measurements, and from the length, bend, and cast-off thus obtained you can have a gun turned out to exactly suit your requirements.

At the shooting-school you will find yourself in the hands of an instructor who will probably surprise you by the way in which he can judge the flight of shot and so correct your errors in gun manipulation when practising at clay birds.

If you cannot afford a new gun by a well-known

maker, go to one of the chief dealers in second-hand weapons of high grade, from whom you can secure a really good gun at a reduced price. There is no comparison between a high-class gun and a cheap, machine-made weapon.

For general shooting there is nothing to beat a double twelve-bore hammerless ejector. The ejector mechanism saves time, and is quite as useful when you are out for a day's rough shooting as at a grouse drive or a covert shoot. Gun barrels vary in length from 25 inches to 30 inches, but experience alone—both at the shooting-school and in the field—will tell you which length suits you best. Short barrels make a gun feel light and handy, and if you can shoot up to your usual standard with 25 inch barrels, well and good. The average weight of a twelve-bore gun is $6\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. If this weight proves too much for you during a long day, get one of the special light twelve-bores. These light models are used with reduced charges, otherwise the recoil is apt to prove unpleasant. Cartridges, like the gun, should be the best you can afford. Twelve-bore cartridges can be obtained anywhere, and if you happen to run out of them during a shoot, you can generally borrow sufficient to carry on with. If you shoot

on a wet day, cheap cases swell, and the ejectors of your gun fail to function properly. Brass cases get over this trouble, as also do the special "water resisting" cases. On the rough shoot, where you carry your cartridges loose in your pockets, the waterproof cases are a great boon. If some of your cartridges are damp on your return home, stand them on the mantelshelf, where the warm air will dry them. Don't put them too near a fire. British cartridges are loaded with different brands of powder, all of which, however, develop the same velocities when corresponding charges are used. No. 5 or No. 6 shot is satisfactory for general shooting.

Having bought a gun it is your duty to keep it clean and in good working order. After shooting, an amount of residue is left in the bore, which consists of cap fouling and powder fouling. A rag or a bunch of tow on the end of a cleaning-rod, plus plenty of elbow grease, will generally suffice to remove this fouling. To make absolutely sure, however, that all the residue has been got rid of, it is well to treat the gun as if it was a rifle, and pour boiling water through the bore. Let the water be really boiling, and pour it into the bore through a funnel. This is only

a minute's job, and the heat will practically dry the barrel. Make sure that the latter *is* dry by running clean rag or tow through it. Having done this, oil the bore with some thin oil. Suitable oils for this purpose are B.S.A. "Kleenwell," "Three-in-one," and "Young's ·303 Cleaner." If the gun is wet when you get home, wipe it thoroughly with a dry cloth, then take it apart. Further moisture is then sure to be found which requires attention with the cloth. Clean and oil the bore as above described. Dry and oil all metal parts, paying particular attention to both sides of the rib, on each of which water collects. This water is easily removed by running the edge of a piece of clean blotting-paper back and forward along the crevice. To get a good oil finish on the stock use linseed oil. Having thoroughly cleaned and oiled the gun, put it together again, insert a "snap-cap" in each barrel, and pull the triggers. It can then be put away in an upright case or gun cabinet. If you don't possess the latter, keep the gun in a leather case, which will serve for travelling purposes as well.

A good gun really deserves a thorough overhaul at the end of each season, and it pays to send

it to your gun-maker. Wet getting under the rib may do much unseen damage, and even a slight knock may dent a barrel. A dent, if neglected, sooner or later becomes a thin spot.

Clean your gun yourself, and don't leave it to the tender mercies of keepers and others. They may do it properly or they may not, but if you do it yourself you *know* you have made a job of it. If you take your gun with you on a visit, be sure that the case contains a cleaning-rod, with a jag and bristle brush, clean rag or tow, and plenty of oil in a bottle or a tin. For use with hot water you can generally borrow a funnel when you get to your destination, or you can take one with you of the type that comes apart, such as is used for petrol.

CHAPTER II

SHOOTING OUTFIT

CHAPTER II

SHOOTING OUTFIT

HAVING provided yourself with a gun and cartridges as described in the previous chapter, there are sundry other items which help to compose your shooting outfit.

When out alone on the rough shoot you will be able to carry all the cartridges you need in your jacket pockets. If, however, you receive an invitation to a shoot you may require many more cartridges, and this necessitates the purchase of a bag to hold them. If you can afford a good leather bag, by all means buy one, if not get a canvas one. If you oil the leather bag thoroughly with neatsfoot oil it will be waterproof. The canvas bag on purchase certainly won't, but you can make it quite as wet-proof as the leather one by giving it a couple of coats of good oil paint. Cartridge bags from stock are much alike, therefore to save mistakes, have your initials or some

other plainly visible mark of identification on your own. Get a bag, or a couple of bags if you do much shooting, to hold a hundred cartridges each. If you are one of the favoured few who get invitations to posh shoots where the total of slain at the end of the day is a heavy one, you can treat yourself to a magazine to hold a reserve supply of cartridges. Such a magazine is not essential, but it will give you a feeling of self-respect.

On a rough shoot where you hunt up your game, the only time you will want to sit down—that is if you are keen and fit—is when you eat your frugal midday lunch. When shooting driven game, however, a portable seat of some kind is useful, and the modern shooting-stick fills the bill. There are various patterns on the market from which to make your choice.

If you shoot alone you will have to carry the game you kill, and will thus come to respect the walking powers and ability of a keeper to follow his master through a long, hard day, and at the same time hump a game-bag which steadily increases in weight. Personally, I do not like a game-bag, but prefer hare-pockets in my shooting jacket. The strap of a bag, when the latter

is growing heavy, cuts into one's shoulder, and if worn over the right shoulder, cramps one's shooting.

As to shooting clothes, they should be perfectly comfortable and not too thick. An easy-fitting jacket and knickerbockers, plus well-nailed shoes or boots enable you to shoot game or stalk deer anywhere. Don't wear gaudy clothes, because game birds and animals have eyes and know how to use them. Make yourself as inconspicuous as possible, and you will profit thereby.

If possible, have soft wrought iron hobs set singly in your boots or shoes, and not too close together. Have a few in the insteps as well, for they will save you many a slip, especially amongst rocks. On hill-ground nails are absolutely indispensable. Without them you will be constantly slipping, if nothing worse, and you can't possibly shoot when you have no control over your feet.

Boots or shoes are purely a matter of personal preference. Some people prefer the former, some the latter. Boots, if worn with anklets, gaiters or putties keep you dry, whereas in shoes you are likely to get wet. You can, of course, punch holes in either boots or shoes to let the

water out, but personally—although I do this with otter-hunting footgear—I like to keep dry when shooting.

If much walking tends to give you sore feet, have your boots made with plenty of room, and wear a pair of thin socks under your shooting stockings. New boots are not the best things to walk far in. When they come from the maker's, wear them about home until they get thoroughly comfortable. After use, put them on trees and oil them. Neatsfoot oil is good, and if you happen to live near the local foxhound kennels, you will find that the fat skimmed off the boiler is equally useful for the purpose. On your return home with wet boots, don't place the latter too near a fire. Put them on the kitchen mantelshelf, where the warm air will dry them slowly. You will be wise to put them there yourself, otherwise some damn fool servant may sling them into the oven where they will be baked to a crisp. This has happened ere now. The hot cupboard in the bathroom isn't a bad place to dry boots, although if you are a married man the missus may have something to say if she finds boots amongst her cherished linen.

The best all-round headgear for shooting is in

my humble opinion a soft felt hat. It both turns rain and affords protection from the sun. Get one of inconspicuous shade, either brown or grey, and with a moderate width of brim. A tweed cap soaks up water like a sponge, and soon becomes a sodden, shapeless mass that conducts water down the back of your neck.

Wear a flannel shirt and a loose, easy-fitting collar. On a real hot day when, say, walking-up grouse on hilly ground, you will have an agreeable sense of freedom if you dispense with collar and tie altogether. At a covert shoot or a grouse drive a woolly of some sort will help to keep you warm on a cold day. Personally, I hate the sleeved sort, as I dislike anything more than shirt sleeves on my arms. A waistcoat I never wear, but use a sleeveless pullover instead.

You can't shoot up to your usual form with cold hands, therefore gloves or mittens should be carried in winter. Woollen gloves are useful if you cut off the trigger-finger of the right hand glove. A mitten on the right hand, and a glove on the left are good too. As to waterproofs, personally I think they are best dispensed with altogether when walking-up game, especially on hilly ground. Getting wet won't hurt you if you

keep moving, and if you are going home in a car, keep a dry coat to put on over your wet things and you will be quite comfortable. Mackintoshes keep the heat in and cause you to sweat, and prove a nuisance to work in. At a grouse drive or covert shoot it is rather a different matter. A waterproof apron or overalls will keep your legs dry, and a light-weight, roomy mackintosh will not greatly interfere with gun manipulation.

There is a good deal of tosh talked by doctors and others regarding the danger of getting wet. If all they say were true, some of us would have been dead many years ago. If you have stalked, hunted, and shot in all weathers over a period of forty years, and are "still going strong," like Johnnie Walker, I think it is fairly convincing proof that the dew and rain from heaven is not so harmful as it is cracked up to be. Colds don't come from being out in the air, although it is wet, but from fugging and frowsting in ill-ventilated living quarters. When fox-hunting on foot on the hills I have times without number sweated till I was wet through, stood shivering for an hour or two at an earth while digging operations were going on, moved off and got warm again, but never felt a bit worse for the

experience. Perhaps I'd better "touch wood." Still, the facts are as stated.

Reverting to shooting gear, cartridges can be carried in a waist-belt. The only times, however, when I have found a cartridge-belt useful were when shooting without a jacket. In New Zealand I often wore one when shooting pigeons from the back of a pony, and I also occasionally wore one to take rifle cartridges when out after wild pig and cattle in the bush. Give me jacket pockets any day instead of a belt for shotgun cartridges. Game can also be carried in various patterns of game-carriers. These are all right in the hands of a keeper or factotum who accompanies the shooter. Recently the *Field* (March 8th, 1930) published a photograph of a wildfowler's belt for carrying ducks. It holds the latter by the heads. Not having any use for a belt, especially with birds dangling from it, I am afraid this new carrier hardly appeals to me. A carrier beats pockets or a game-bag in one respect, i.e., it does not crush the game, and allows air to circulate round it. I should not care to walk far with, say, two or three brace of grouse dangling from a belt, especially if any of them exuded blood, which would be sure to

stain one's breeches. Where rabbits are concerned, a length of soft rope makes a useful carrier. The rabbits are "harled" and slung on the doubled rope, the latter resting on one's shoulder, with a more or less even number of rabbits hanging fore and aft.

A knife with a serviceable blade is an almost indispensable item of the shooter's—at any rate rough shooter's—outfit. The blade should be kept really sharp.

Having got together all your requisite gear, the next thing for your consideration is your own fitness. If you are not in fair training you will never shoot as well as you ought to. What is one man's meat may be another man's poison, but it is pretty safe to say that over indulgence in food, late hours, tobacco, and spirituous liquors will never help you to improve your average with the gun. Moderation should be your watch-word, although as far as tobacco is concerned, some men can apparently smoke with impunity. I am afraid I am one of the latter myself, although I seldom smoke when I am actually shooting. It is useless attempting to set down rules for other people to follow, except perhaps to mention that if you leave a sedentary

occupation for say a fortnight's holiday stalking deer or shooting grouse over dogs, take matters a bit easily at first, otherwise you will overdo it and reap little benefit from your outing. An easy jaunt for the keeper or the stalker may prove a weary journey for you in your soft condition. Always carry a packet of lunch in your pocket, except when you go to a shoot where a regular lunch is provided by your host. The latter may tempt you with dainty viands, but think of your shooting, and go easy on the victuals. It doesn't much matter what you carry in the way of lunch. It may consist of sandwiches, bread and cheese, or anything else you fancy. By noon or a bit later you will be quite ready for it, and glad to sit down for half an hour or so. A bottle of beer, a modicum of whisky and water, or water alone, will prove acceptable at lunch time. Whatever you are going to drink, drink it then, and don't keep sampling the contents of the various becks and burns during the day. In hot weather the more water you drink the more you want, and you will walk and shoot much better if you leave it alone. A toothful of something is grateful at the lunch hour, and before you start for home you will be ready for another.

Before you may use or carry a gun you must provide yourself with a licence. Such a licence is obtainable at any post office, costs ten shillings yearly, and expires on July 31st in each year. In order to kill game, however, you will require a game certificate, costing £3. It is an offence against the Game Licences Act, 1860, to use any dog, gun, net or other engine for the purpose of taking, killing, or pursuing any game, or any woodcock, snipe, quail, or landrail, or any coney or deer without a proper licence. Certain persons are exempt, i.e., gamekeepers on Crown lands, and tenant farmers under the Ground Game Act, but an ordinary person shooting rabbits must have a game licence. A gun licence is not necessary in addition to a game certificate, nor is it required for any person using a gun to scare birds or kill vermin by direction of the occupier on his own lands, if the occupier himself has a game certificate or gun licence.

Having taken up the sport of shooting, I advise you to keep a game register, in which may be recorded a list of the game you kill, with any remarks. The average game-book you buy is usually lacking in one respect, i.e., that the remarks column is quite inadequate. A day's

shooting, as well as the game killed, often provides incidents and examples that are well worth putting on paper for future reference. If you are really interested in the birds and beasts which fall to your gun, your remarks column will soon contain quite a budget of useful data. In my own book, for example, I have long lists of the crop contents of the various game birds, as well as the weights of grit taken from their gizzards. The weights of the birds and animals themselves are also of interest. Unless your game-book provides a remarks column with plenty of space, it is a good plan to keep a separate note-book for remarks, with dates corresponding to those in the game register.

When filling in your game-book at the end of a day's shooting, take care to be quite truthful. Put down only such items of game as actually came to hand, and don't count birds which you think you killed but couldn't find.

CHAPTER III

FIRST EXPERIENCES IN SHOOTING

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In those good pre-war days before the majority of landed proprietors were obliged to sell their ancestral estates, the son of the house was entered to the gun at a comparatively tender age. The old keeper was as keen to instruct his young master in game shooting and game finding as his pupil was to learn. The combination was a good one, for the boy came to look upon shooting as a real field sport, and not a mere test of marksmanship.

While marksmanship is of course essential in the clean killing of game, to really love shooting you must understand the many other matters that help towards the successful completion of a day's sport. On the rough shoot where you have to hunt up your game and carry it yourself after you have shot it, a knowledge of the habits of the creatures you pursue will help you considerably in filling the bag. Carrying the latter, plus hard

walking, will help to make you respect the keeper who follows a keen shot, and bears the burden of the game bag all day long. When you are asked to take part in a day's pheasant, partridge, or grouse shooting, you realize that the hard work falls upon the beaters. Perhaps, however, you fail to recognize just *how* hard that work may be, so it will probably do you a world of good to take a stick instead of a gun, and join the ranks of the beaters for a day.

Then again, you see the beaters at work, and you can hardly fail to understand that their manœuvres are planned for a special purpose. It is not their brains, however, which do the planning, although incidentally a beater with brains is better than one without, but the grey matter of the head keeper and his master. Nothing is done haphazard, everything works smoothly, and alternative moves are kept in mind, in case wind or weather may alter the original plan. In order, therefore, to learn the why and the wherefore of these things, don't be afraid to ask your host or his head keeper for information. They will be only too pleased to give it to you, seeing that you take an intelligent interest in the proceedings.

On the rough shoot, in addition to hunting up game for yourself, you will get a chance to practise impromptu driving. One or two of your friends or members of your family can be persuaded to act as beaters, and in this way you will quickly discover how difficult it is to make birds go where you want them. As a matter of fact, where game is not too plentiful and beaters few, the driving of birds to, say, three guns is often a difficult proposition. When your plan works successfully it is a decided feather in your cap, and there is cause for all round rejoicing.

It should be your aim not only to hit game, but to kill it cleanly. Far better to miss bird after bird than wound them and see them go on. Here, if you are a beginner, the shooting-school and its instructor come in. At the school you can get all the practice you want at clay birds under conditions that closely approximate to those in the shooting field. Any particular sort of shot that happens to defeat you can be practised again and again until you learn how to deal with it, and the instructor will explain your errors. If you really like shooting you will get keen enough on these clay bird stunts, and they will perhaps foster a desire to take part in clay

pigeon shooting competitions. The latter are very good in their way, but you will do well to remember that they *are* competitions. Shooting, on the other hand, is a field sport, and the man who shoots game with no other desire than to beat his neighbour's score, is not a nice companion. Give and take should be your motto afield. Do your best to keep your end up with the rest of the guns, or, in other words, try to shoot up to your usual standard, but eschew jealousy. If a bird is likely to offer your neighbour a more sporting shot than yourself, let it go and don't mop it up. Likewise, at the end of a drive if there is any doubt as to the ownership of a dead bird, give your neighbour the benefit.

As regards the actual technique of shooting, you can learn all you need from a competent instructor at a shooting-school. In these modern days people specialize in sports and pastimes, with the result that you hardly ever pick up a sporting paper that does not contain an analysis of golf, fly-fishing, shooting, or some other pursuit, with diagrams showing you how the thing should be done. This is all very well in its way, but with shooting, as with most other pursuits in this life, what is applicable to one man may not

apply to another. A boy with an aptitude for shooting may, without ever going to a shooting-school, rapidly develop into a first class shot, although his technique will perhaps appear faulty to a more experienced performer. It is well to cultivate good style in shooting from the beginning, but many personal idiosyncrasies creep in, so that no exactly definite rules can be laid down. Some men are born to shoot well, and the brilliant performer always exhibits style in his shooting. He is quick yet never seems to be in a hurry, takes his shots at exactly the right moment, and kills his birds dead. If you ask him how he does it, he will probably say he doesn't know.

There are certain details of shooting technique which you should learn before you can ape the expert. Hold your gun so that the barrels are level and not tilted over, and when shooting at a crossing bird swing the gun well forward and keep it moving until after you have pressed the trigger. Your target is moving—often very fast—and you should endeavour to give such forward allowance as will enable the shot charge and the bird to meet. Practice alone will teach you the requisite amount of forward allowance. Never be afraid to swing too far in front, for most shots

are missed, or birds wounded, by shooting behind. A shot-gun is not a weapon to aim with like a rifle. Once you try to aim you will cultivate a slow, poking style. Instead, keep both eyes open, watch your moving target, swing, and shoot. Practise this method and the whole thing, from the gun coming up to the trigger pressing, will be an unconscious performance on your part.

Whilst you get many crossing chances during a day's shooting, you also get birds coming to you or going away. If a bird is doing either of the latter things, and is on a level with your eyes, shoot straight *at* it. If, however, it is above that level, you must make some allowance. For a bird coming to you, shoot over it, and for one going away, under it. When walking-up game and a bird rises below you on a slope, shoot over it, and the same when a bird rises on level ground and goes straight away.

When hunting up game on a rough shoot, especially if the ground is hilly, you have no time to pay attention to your feet, and may have to shoot from an uncomfortable and unbalanced position. Whilst waiting for birds to come to you, however, you can find level foothold, and stand in an easy position that will enable you to make

the most of your chances. Anything that offers obstruction underfoot can be removed, so that you have sufficient clear space to stand on.

If you start your shooting career by pottering about in search of game—as you ought to—you will probably have no one to think about but yourself. On the other hand, if you are invited to a shoot, you will be only one amongst a number of guns. Whichever you do, you should always remember that a gun is a lethal weapon, and as such should be used with care and discrimination. Shooting alone or in company, always take the cartridges out of your gun when getting over a wall, a hedge, or other obstacle. When loading your gun, bring the stock up to the barrels after the cartridges have been inserted, and see that the barrels are not pointing anywhere except towards the ground. Even when you know your gun is empty, treat it as if it was loaded. In the sporting press you will frequently see pictures of shooting groups, the members of which are holding their guns in the most dangerous positions. Such people never learn sense until they meet with an accident, and then it is too late.

When out alone you have free scope to shoot

at almost any angle, but in company there are other guns to consider, as well as beaters. Even alone you should take care not to shoot towards a hedge bordering a road, as you never know who may be passing.

Shot pellets take the most erratic course at times, especially if they ricochet off stones, hard ground, twigs, or even the stiff flight feathers of game birds. When the beaters are getting close, do not shoot at a bird or birds in front unless they are high in the air. If you stand some distance back from a hedge when shooting driven partridges, on no account allow a human being or a dog to sit under the fence in front of you. A diverging pellet or pellets may hit them, and they are in danger, too, from the other guns. When in line, shoot at a safe angle in front or behind, but don't follow a bird round or you may hit one of your neighbours. It is time enough to load your gun when you get to your stand, or you actually begin walking-up. Before loading see that your gun barrels are clear of obstruction, especially in snowy weather. At lunch time unload, and place your gun where it will not point towards anybody, or be in danger of getting knocked down and dented. A gun

that is laid on the ground can easily get snow or other foreign substance into the barrels, and if the obstruction is not removed, it means a burst, and possible serious injury to the shooter.

When out alone on the rough shoot, take your time, work your ground thoroughly, and don't make a practice of firing long shots. Also keep alert and don't let your attention wander, otherwise you are sure to miss some chances.

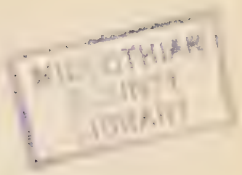
When you are shooting as a guest, keep to the place marked as your position, and refrain from talking. Likewise, stand still, especially if you are in a grouse butt. Birds are quick to spot movement, and sheer off accordingly. If plenty of birds are coming to you, keep on killing them in front instead of turning round to shoot. Pick your birds and don't waver in your selection. Try to keep a correct account of the birds you kill and their positions, in order to facilitate the picking up after each beat.

When you have become really efficient in the art of shooting you may wish to acquire a second gun and make use of the services of a loader. In order to change guns quickly at a shoot, both you and your loader will require plenty of practice. The latter is perhaps best gained at a

shooting-school, under the tuition of a competent instructor. Having made yourself familiar with the correct method of changing, you can then impart your knowledge to the person who is to act as loader for you.

CHAPTER IV

SOME SHOOTING DON'TS



CHAPTER IV

SOME SHOOTING DON'TS

As already mentioned in a previous chapter, it should never be forgotten that a gun is a lethal weapon requiring the most careful handling. "Safety first" should therefore be your motto. Most gun accidents are the result of sheer carelessness, either on your own part or somebody else's. It is the damn fool of the "I didn't know it was loaded" type who is responsible for the greater number of them.

Don't take risks. The simplest fence may cause an accident if you cross it with a loaded gun. Always take the cartridges out before surmounting any obstacle. Don't *think* your gun is unloaded, open it and make *sure*. Never under any consideration bring a loaded gun into the house. Unload before you get there, and place the gun in the proper gun cupboard even if you are going to use it again shortly. Put the

cartridges away too, especially if there are children in the house.

Don't carry a loaded gun between beats when walking with other people, and unload after a grouse drive or covert shoot before you rejoin the other guns.

At lunch time be sure your gun is unloaded and placed in a safe position where it will not fall down or point towards anybody.

The same applies to a gun in a car or vehicle of any kind.

If you are shooting from a boat or make use of the latter for a ferry, always unload the gun except when actually shooting. An accidental discharge may blow a hole in the boat, and if you can't swim you may drown if the boat sinks. Don't lay an unloaded gun in a boat with its barrels pointing at yourself or anybody else.

Never stand with the butt of the gun on the ground, and your hand or hands over the muzzle. If you are being photographed in a group, hold your unloaded gun in a safe position, neither pointing at yourself nor at any other member of the party. The sporting press is full of photographs of trap-shooters and others where men are standing with their hands over their gun

muzzles, or pointing directly towards their neighbour's stomach.

If you chance to fall whilst carrying a loaded gun, stick to it if possible, for if you let go, it may land with the barrels pointing towards you and go off. Keep the gun well out and pointing ahead of you. When you get up, unload and see that the barrels are clear of dirt or snow, otherwise the gun may burst when next you fire it.

Don't take risks when shooting in the company of other people. Never shoot at a dangerous angle or straight down the line, or follow through at a bird flying from front to rear.

If you can't see your neighbour owing to the conformation of the ground, as sometimes happens at a grouse drive, place a white stone or some other object to mark the line if there is not one there already. Treat that mark as if it was a man standing in plain view.

When loading your gun insert the cartridges and bring the stock up to the barrels, keeping the latter pointed towards the ground.

Don't lend your gun even to your best friend, for if you do something is sure to happen to it. On the other hand, don't try to borrow your neigh-

bour's gun for the same reason. You can hire a gun from your gunmaker if your own happens to be undergoing repairs.

Don't carry a gun in any old way, but either under your arm with the barrels pointing towards the ground, or over your shoulder with the trigger-guard uppermost and the barrels pointing well up into the air. If the gun happens to go off in either of these positions, there is little likelihood of shooting anyone.

Don't shoot at game too near and smash it, nor fire very long shots and perhaps wound it. Better miss altogether than "tailor" your birds.

Don't take a dog with you when you are invited to a shoot unless it is perfectly steady and under command, and don't take it then unless your host expresses a wish for you to do so.

Shooting is a field sport, so no matter how keen you may be to smash clay birds in close competition with other trap-shooters, don't try the same game in the shooting field, or you are likely to become exceedingly unpopular. Remember, as our Yankee cousins would say, that it is "not all of shooting just to shoot." It is nice to feel you are keeping your end up in the company of other guns as far as marksmanship is concerned, but

there are many things over and above the actual shooting which go towards the making of a perfect day. The man who thinks of little but kills to cartridges misses a great deal that the less seriously minded shooter finds pleasure in.

Try to be good tempered and cheerful even if you are shooting badly. Keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut, especially when in the company of old and experienced guns, and you will probably learn something about shooting that you didn't know before.

Don't on any account be stand-offish with the farmers, shepherds, or agricultural workers over whose land you shoot. Remember that a cheery word, a pipe of baccy or a cigarette go a long way towards cementing a kindly feeling. These people can help you in many ways, and they can be equally disagreeable if you get at outs with them. Try to pick up some knowledge of agriculture, then you can talk to them in a language that they understand.

Don't forget them, either—if you have a shoot of your own—when making presents of game. The farmer may appreciate a brace of birds, but in all probability his men will prefer a hare or a couple of rabbits.

Be punctilious about your boundaries, and see that your keeper, if you have one, is equally so. Nothing is more likely to cause friction between neighbours than a careless observance of boundaries.

CHAPTER V

PHEASANTS, PARTRIDGES, AND GROUND GAME

CHAPTER V

PHEASANTS, PARTRIDGES, AND GROUND GAME

Unless your idea of shooting is marksmanship pure and simple, you will take an intelligent interest in the game that falls to your gun, not only in the shooting season but the close time as well. If you hunt up your game on the rough shoot, alone or in company, a knowledge of the habits of birds and beasts will assist you to fill the bag.

The feeding habits of game naturally govern the situations in which it is found. By examining the crop and gizzard contents of the birds you kill, you can ascertain what they have been feeding on. If you jot down in your notebook the results of such post-mortems, you will gradually accumulate a wealth of first hand information that will prove exceedingly useful for future reference.

In the same way with weights and measure-

ments. The scales and the steel tape are additional helps to securing items worth noting. Abnormalities in both bird and animal life crop up at intervals, such as albinos, hybrids, deformities, etc., and notes concerning them are always worth keeping.

On the average shoot, be it of the rough variety or more pretentious type, pheasants and partridges will form the chief feathered game. On a regularly organized shoot pheasants are usually hand-reared in numbers, whereas on the rough shoot the stock consists of wild-bred birds. In dealing with the pheasant, therefore, we will consider the wild bird. The pheasant is not indigenous to Britain, the original stock having in all probability been introduced by the Romans. Later, various other species found their way to this country, such as the Chinese, Japanese, and Mongolian pheasants. All these have been interbred, with the result that there are many crosses.

The original introduction (*Phasianus colchicus*) has, in the case of the cock bird, a dark green neck. The Mongolian cock (*P. mongolicus*) has a broad white neck-band and white wing-coverts. The Chinese bird (*P. torquatus*) also has a white

wing. The Japanese (*P. versicolor*) has a handsome plumage, exhibiting shades of purple, blue, and green. Nowadays we have a new type of pheasant, known as the "melanistic mutant," with a grouse-like plumage. It has bred from the pheasants in this country, but is not a cross between two species. In addition to the birds above mentioned, there are various fancy breeds of pheasants such as the Reeves's and the Amherst. These are usually, however, confined in aviaries. If you wish to make yourself familiar with the pheasants which you are likely to shoot, visit one or more of the well-known game-farms, where you can examine them in the flesh.

A wild cock pheasant averages about $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb. in weight, and a hen $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb. One or two weights taken at random from my game-book are as follows: 3 lb. $1\frac{3}{4}$ oz., 2 lb. $11\frac{1}{2}$ oz., 2 lb. $6\frac{1}{2}$ oz. Hen pheasant, 2 lb. 3 oz.

The hen begins to nest towards the end of April, and lays from eight to fourteen olive-brown eggs. The period of incubation is about twenty-three days.

The list of edible matter that appeals to the wild pheasant is a varied one. For example, a

cock pheasant shot in November had in its crop three small frosted potatoes, one holly berry, and a large quantity of oak spangles. In the bird's gizzard was 140 grains weight of grit, consisting of softish pebbles, plus a few hawthorn stones.

Game birds pick up grit for grinding the food in their gizzards. The gizzard is worked by powerful muscles, which with the help of the grit pulp the food and prepare it for digestion. Most game birds prefer quartz grit when they can get it, but pheasants can do very well with softer material.

In the gizzard of another cock pheasant shot in November, there was 190 grains weight of grit, plus several small bits of crockery, two bits of blue glass, and a lot of holly seeds. The grit consisted chiefly of quartz and other hard pebbles.

In the crop of a cock pheasant shot in January, the contents consisted entirely of pilewort tubers. The gizzard contained besides grit, sixteen hawthorn stones, forty-two holly seeds, and one prunus seed.

The grit in the gizzard is unable to deal with very hard seeds, so the latter remain whole until they are eventually evacuated.

The crop of a hen pheasant shot in October, contained six small black slugs, several dark beetles, a large number of pilewort tubers, one yellow striped caterpillar, one female cross-spider, grass-seeds, rush-seeds, one flower-head of ranunculus, tormentil leaves, and seed capsules of heartsease.

In addition to the items of food mentioned above, pheasants eat acorns, beech-mast, grain, weed-seeds, and various berries such as those of the hawthorn and the mountain ash. They also devour leather-jackets and wire-worms, and in this respect are a benefit to agriculture.

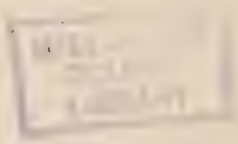
Pheasants are great wanderers, getting their food in all sorts of places. Wet ground appeals to them, and you can nearly always flush a bird or two beside a river or lake. In the North you will find them right out on the moor amongst the heather, and in the tree-fringed ghylls on the hillsides.

On the rough shoot you will have to hunt for your pheasants, and in order to make a bag you will require a dog that will face thick covert. In winter, when snow has fallen, you can have a lot of fun tracking pheasants. When following tracks you will be surprised at the amount of

ground a wild pheasant will cover in its wanderings. If you happen to have a covert or two on the shoot, you can get some of your friends to act as beaters, or go inside yourself with the dog and push birds out to the guns. On a more pretentious shoot you will naturally wish to do things on a larger scale, necessitating the hand-rearing of birds, and the employment of keepers and hired beaters. If you have already had some experience of covert shooting as a guest, you will be more or less familiar with the proceedings, but in order to secure further information I recommend you to peruse an up-to-date book dealing with the subject, such as the "Shooting" volume of the new Lonsdale Library series, where minute instructions are given in all that relates to sport with the gun.

Turning from pheasants to partridges, we have two species of the latter in this country, i.e., the common or grey partridge (*Perdrix cinerea*), and the French or red-legged partridge (*Caccabis rufa*). The common partridge is indigenous, whereas the French bird was introduced in 1673. The latter is brighter coloured than our own bird, having a red beak and red legs. The throat is white edged with a band of black, and

PHEASANTS



the flank feathers, blue-grey in colour, are tipped with chestnut. The cock bird exhibits partially developed spurs, which serve to easily distinguish between the sexes. You can tell a young Frenchman of the year by looking at the first flight feather which has a buff tip. The eggs of the French partridge are buff with brown spots, whereas those of the English bird are olive-brown. French partridges are great runners, trusting to their legs until forced to take wing.

The plumage of the English partridge is more or less alike in both sexes. The forehead, throat, and sides of head chestnut. Back brown and grey with dark bars and buff streaks. Tail, with exception of the central feathers, chestnut-red. Breast grey, finely barred with black. Abdomen white with a chestnut-brown horseshoe. Variations in the general colour scheme crop up occasionally. The usual chestnut-brown horseshoe is sometimes black, and white horseshoes have been recorded. Partridges inhabiting highly farmed arable land are brighter coloured than those which are bred in moorland country. Hill-partridges exhibit a good deal of grey in their plumage, and are generally smaller than their lowland cousins.

The French partridge is heavier than the English. A cock Frenchman will weigh 1 lb. or a trifle over. English partridges average from 13 oz. to 15 oz., roughly speaking. Three weights entered in my game-book of hill-partridges, are 13¾ oz., 13¾ oz., and 12½ oz. (young).

To differentiate between the sexes of English partridges, examine the medium wing-coverts. In the cock bird these show grey mottling and a pale buff shaft-stripe. In the hen there is the same stripe, with bars of buff and dark brown.

Generally speaking, partridges nest in May and hatch in June. Hill-country birds are later than those farther south. From ten to fourteen is a usual number of eggs, although twenty or more may be laid. The period of incubation is about twenty-one days.

Partridges eat a variety of food, depending upon the character of the ground they inhabit. Like other game birds they pick up various insects, but the latter are, in my experience, seldom found in the crops or gizzards of partridges during the shooting season. Partridges use quartz grit, if available, to grind their food, otherwise they are content with softer material.

A hill-partridge weighing 13¾ oz., shot at dusk

on the edge of the moor in September, had 70 grains weight of quartz grit in its gizzard. The crop contents consisted of trefoil leaves and grass-tips, ranunculus flowers and seed-heads, umbellifer seed-heads, grass seeds, tormentil leaves, wild thyme, and one seed capsule of heartsease.

Another hill-partridge, weighing 13 oz., shot near the moor in September, had 52 grains weight of small grit in its gizzard, and the crop contained seed-heads of field groundsel and bits of clover leaves.

In the Midlands and the South, partridges live a great deal on grain and grain shoots. A list of partridge crop contents is given in "Partridges: Yesterday and To-day" (Field Press Limited). Five birds were examined in November, 1926. In the crop of No. 1 were 520 shoots of wheat, 40 shoots of oats, 9 clover leaves, 420 seeds of the wild, false oat, and 8 seeds of stone-weed. No. 2, 253 leaves of young trefolium, 87 shoots of wheat, 20 shoots of grass, 7 shoots of oats. No. 3, 150 grains of wheat, 16 grains of oats, 42 seeds of charlock, 96 seeds of stone-weed, 55 shoots of wheat, 15 shoots of grass, 2 clover leaves.

Partridges seem to prefer grain and seeds to young growing cereals.

If you begin your partridge shooting by walking after birds—as you should, because it will teach you a lot about their habits—you will probably have to work hard to make a bag. This will most certainly be the case if you are in search of hill-partridges amongst a sea of grass, or on the borders of the moor. In hilly country birds can often be located by the use of field-glasses. They can then be stalked, or if, owing to the open nature of the ground, a close approach is impossible, an attempt can be made to drive them. If you can muster, say, three guns and a couple of helpers, the latter will act as beaters, and they can mark the direction of the birds' flight after they have been flushed. This marking is important if you are hopeful of getting on terms with the birds again. Even with only a small party, always adopt the half-moon formation when walking-up partridges. This consists of forming a line at the base of a field, the two outside men on either flank advancing straight up the field at a given signal. They are then followed by the next two, and so on, until the entire line is moving in a half-circle. By making

PARTRIDGE

LOS ANGELES
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

use of this method the flank men are in position before the main body of the birds rise. Birds breaking out on the flanks can thus be dealt with, and the same with others that rise and turn inwards, curling back over the centre. On the rough shoot, with only a small party, there will, of course, be wide gaps in the line, still the half-moon always pays better than if the line was straight. With plenty of guns and beaters large fields can be closely worked. Careful shooting is then essential in order not to hit your neighbours.

Success in walking-up partridges, either on the rough shoot or elsewhere, depends on an intimate knowledge of the ground, the whereabouts of the birds, and their most likely flight-lines, plus a perfect understanding between the guns forming the party. The idea, especially on the rough shoot where the boundaries are not as wide as those on a large estate, is to manœuvre so as to push the birds towards the centre of the ground. Impromptu driving with one or two beaters and, say, three guns, will teach you a lot about the difficulty of making birds go where you want them to, so that you will come to respect the organization on a big shoot where driving is

carried out on a large scale. If you know the habits of partridges, you can tell with more or less certainty where they will be. On arable land with crops and stubble, plus some grass fields, the idea is to get the birds into the crops so that they will lie and you can deal with them. Here is where an intimate knowledge of the different fields comes in.

When driving partridges, much depends on the direction and strength of the wind. The general idea is to push the birds from open fields into crops, from which they are flushed and sent over the guns. Behind the latter are more crops where the birds will settle, and from which they can again be flushed for a return drive. While this may sound simple enough, and may be simple if open fields and crops are nicely placed with regard to the boundaries, to say nothing of wind from the right direction, it may prove just the opposite on a day of adverse winds, and with crops less well situated. If you are really interested in shooting, apart from pure marksmanship, you will grow to appreciate the skill required to manœuvre partridges under difficult conditions. A bag so obtained is worth more than one double its size got under easy conditions.

When you begin your shooting career, rabbits will afford you plenty of practice. On many a rough shoot rabbits are the mainstay of the place, with perhaps a hare or two to lend variety to the bag. While rabbit shooting cannot compare with grouse or partridge driving, a day with the bunnies will provide plenty of fun, and the sale of the bag will help to pay for cartridges and other incidental expenses. There is usually no trouble whatever in raising a stock of rabbits, for the animals are so prolific that the difficulty on many estates is to keep them sufficiently reduced. The chief thing in the management of rabbits is to kill them off early, before they can do damage, and while they are in marketable condition. Clean them up in covert by the end of November, for if you don't and hard weather comes, they will start barking the hazels and other trees. Killing off the stock early allows the rabbit-tainted ground to sweeten before the remaining breeding-stock begins to renew itself. There are several ways of accounting for rabbits with the gun, i.e., walking-up, driving, ferreting, and stalking with a miniature rifle.

In covert you can roust rabbits out with the help of a dog or dogs, including beagles. Using

the latter you may enjoy a bit of hound music as well as the shooting. Any sort of dog will hunt rabbits, terriers and spaniels being about the most useful. When shooting rabbits over a dog or dogs, you will get plenty of snap-shots at your flying quarry, and it behoves you to see that you don't pepper one of your canine aids which may be in close pursuit.

Where rabbits lie out in numbers in the fields, walking in line will provide a lot of shooting. In covert, or outside where there is plenty of undergrowth in which rabbits can lie, it pays to stink out the burrows with Renardine or some other evil-smelling concoction. The paunches of rabbits act very well, especially if a little gas tar is added. Tar and paraffin makes a useful stinking-out mixture. The latter is placed inside all burrows, causing the rabbits to leave their underground abodes and lie out in the nearest undergrowth. The burrows are then stopped with a spade, and a little of the mixture is sprinkled on the stopping. If the weather is stormy some of the burrows may be reopened, and these should be attended to again. On the morning of the shoot, any reopened holes should be stopped. The rabbits thus forced to lie out,

can be driven by beaters to guns posted at open rides or other vantage-points. When two guns only cover a ride, they can stand back to back in the middle of it. If there are more guns they should stand right back at the edge of the ride so as to eliminate the danger of shooting at too close an angle to each other. The guns should have their backs to the direction from which the rabbits are being driven. With a covert full of stunk out rabbits you will get some very brisk shooting that will afford you more sport than any other method.

Ferreting rabbits is quite good fun, provided that there are plenty of them, that they are in a bolting humour, and that you have a good supply of ferrets so that if one or two chance to lie-up you can still carry on. Otherwise ferreting is apt to be a deadly dull business, involving more manual labour with bar and spade than shooting.

There are a few points you should remember when ferreting, i.e., to stand down wind of the burrows, and not too close. Don't talk, and don't tramp about unnecessarily. Rabbits have noses and ears and can use both to some tune. The person handling the ferrets should move about as quietly as possible, and slip the ferrets

into the outside holes of the rabbit colony. The guns should allow all rabbits to get well clear of the burrows before shooting, and on no account shoot at a rabbit popping from one burrow to another, or sitting at the entrance to a hole. If they do, some rabbits are sure to be hard hit and yet able to get underground, while there is every likelihood of shooting a ferret.

Give your rabbits plenty of forward allowance, and try to hit them in the head and so make a clean kill. "Tailored" rabbits are no use for sale, nor does the cook appreciate handling them.

You can have a bit of sport amongst the rabbits with a ·22 bore rifle, using the long rifle cartridge. Get a repeater such as the B.S.A. people sell, or one of the American repeaters. In summer you can knock over a young rabbit or two for the pot, while during the regular season you can try your hand at running rabbits. When doing the latter, always remember that a long rifle bullet carries a considerable distance, and may ricochet if you miss, so take care you have a safe background. You may waste a lot of cartridges at this running bunny business, but it is grand practice, and you will be surprised how many rabbits you can kill if you stick to it. It is

generally a case of a clean kill or a clean miss. Where rabbits inhabit ledges and crannies in the cliffs, a miniature rifle comes in very useful. I have killed hundreds with such a weapon on the limestone scars in Yorkshire.

Rabbits for sale should be very cleanly shot. If you can't manage to do this, ferret and net them, or take them in snares. Practice, however, will make you expert enough with the gun, especially if you visit a shooting-school and get the instructor to coach you. Rabbit shooting, especially in covert, will eradicate any tendency on your part to become a slow, poking shot. Rabbits hustled about amongst undergrowth only afford you brief glimpses of which to take advantage.

Having got your rabbits, allow them to get quite cool, then paunch them neatly. Before packing, smooth down the fur and make them look as neat as possible. Pack them in layers in a hamper so that they won't be shaken about in transport, and send them off to market. The cleaner they are on arrival, the better prices will they fetch. Fresh rabbit paunches are useful for stinking-out purposes, and if buried for a time can be used as manure. If you don't wish to

use the paunches, bury them, otherwise they only serve to attract flies and vermin.

Rabbits are usually laid down by the doe in a short burrow away from the main colony. The doe lines the nest with fur from her own body, and when she leaves her young ones, she blocks the entrance to the hole or "stop" with earth. When the earth dries in the sun it becomes very noticeable, and affords plain evidence to one who knows.

The average weight of a rabbit is about 3 lb. I find in my game-book two weights of 3 lb. 4½ oz. and 3 lb. 14½ oz., both buck rabbits, and a doe 3 lb. 9 oz.

On the rough shoot you may have a hare or two, while in some counties such as Oxfordshire, hares are to be counted in their hundreds. A crossing shot at a hare going really fast is not to be despised, but if you are out alone you will take jolly good care not to shoot more than one if you are carrying the bag. A hare weighs anything from 7 lb. to 9 lb., making a very cumbersome load. Where hares become too numerous, and there are not very many places nowadays where they do, they have of course to be kept down by shooting. Personally, I consider

HARE

a hare the legitimate quarry for beagles, harriers, and greyhounds. The only pleasure I derive from shooting a hare is after tracking her to her form in the snow, and then it is the tracking rather than the final shot that appeals. If you want to know something of the habits of hares, track them in winter, and you will soon understand how their doubles and shifts can outwit hounds unless scent is really good.

Hares lie in covert as well as the open, and can be driven to the guns or walked-up. They can also be stalked and shot with a rifle.

As the doe rabbit provides an underground birthplace for her young, the latter are blind and naked when they arrive. The doe hare, on the other hand, lives above ground, and her young are born there, being clothed in fur and having their eyes open at birth. The doe hides her youngsters—which may number from two to five—in separate forms in the grass to insure their greater safety.

Some weights of hares, taken from my game-book, are : 6 lb. $4\frac{3}{4}$ oz., 6 lb. $8\frac{3}{4}$ oz., 7 lb. $8\frac{1}{2}$ oz., 5 lb. 14 oz., 6 lb. $8\frac{1}{2}$ oz., 5 lb. 9 oz., 6 lb. 10 oz. These hares were shot on moorland ground, where they do not average as heavy as in the low country.

CHAPTER VI

GROUSE AND BLACKGAME

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GROUSE AND BLACKGAME

When you leave the South for the Border Country and Scotland, you arrive in a land where grouse and blackgame take the place of partridges and pheasants. The prevailing landscape consists of hills and heather, with here and there a fir wood or a coppice-studded slope. On the moor itself you find grouse, but the majority of the blackgame frequent the environs of the heather, where they get a considerable portion of their food from the trees.

Although not a large bird, the red grouse (*Lagopus scoticus*) is from a sporting viewpoint second to none. Grouse vary in weight, the average, roughly speaking, being 24 oz. for a cock, and 21 oz. for a hen. Courtship in spring brings down the weight of the cock grouse, whereas the hen puts on weight at that period. A grouse weighing 35 oz. was reported in the *Field* of December 30th, 1922, this weight being

quite exceptional. Some weights of grouse taken from my game-book, with the months in which the birds were killed, are as follows: Cock, 24¼ oz. (August); cock, 27 oz. (September); cock, 26½ oz. (September); cock, 27 oz. (October); cock, 26¾ oz. (November); cock, 25½ oz. (November); hen, 21¼ oz. (September); hen, 22¼ oz. (September).

Grouse begin to nest in April. The number of eggs laid varies, six to eight being a rough average. The period of incubation is twenty-four days.

There is a considerable difference in the plumage of grouse, according to the time of year and the locality in which the birds live. Both cock and hen grouse moult twice in the year, but the change takes place in the hen two months earlier than is the case with the cock. Irregularities occur in the plumage through the ravages of disease, whereby the moult is deferred, and the normal plumage changes are thereby hidden. The plumage of cock and hen grouse is much alike at midsummer. Towards the end of April and in May, the hen grouse is in full summer plumage, having donned her breeding dress of black and buff-barred feathers.

GROUSE

MIDLOTHIAN
COUNTY

There are three distinct types of plumage in the cock grouse, these being local variations. They consist of the red form, the black form, and the white-spotted form. I have shot quite good specimens of the last named in Yorkshire and Westmorland.

In the hen grouse we find five types of plumage, i.e., the red form, the black form, the white-spotted form, the buff-spotted form, and the buff-barred form.

It is not always easy to differentiate between the sexes of grouse by plumage alone. If there is a doubt, dissection will at once settle the question. Still, the plumage is a fair guide to sex. From August to November, that is practically throughout the shooting season, the chestnut-red feathers on the chin of the cock grouse are the chief aid to differentiation of the sexes. During the entire twelve months of the year the cock exhibits these feathers, but in the shooting season they are absent in the hen. Where adult grouse are concerned, weight is a useful aid to differentiation in sex. If you are interested in the plumage of grouse, you will find a detailed account of same in "The Grouse in Health and in Disease," which comprises the

report of the committee of inquiry on grouse disease.

The chief food of grouse consists of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). Other plants on which grouse feed are blaeberry, cranberry, cloudberry, red bear berry, bell heather, crowberry, cross-leafed heath, dwarf willow, bog myrtle, cotton grass, sorrel, etc. Young grouse eat a greater variety of food than their parents, especially where insects are concerned. I have examined many crop contents of adult grouse, but very seldom found the remains of insects in them. During an extra dry season on the moor, crane-flies or "daddy-long-legs" are always much in evidence, and grouse of suitable size will eat these flies. I killed a young grouse on August 13th, 1927, which had five crane-flies in its crop. In the crop of another young bird, shot the same day, there was heather and a few sorrel tips. Sheep's wool is often to be found in the crops of grouse, the strands being picked up with the heather.

Grouse make their chief meal towards evening, so that the food will last them overnight. The birds' gizzards always contain quartz grit, which pulps the food. The average weight of grit

found in the gizzards of adult birds is about 120 grains. The following list of grit and food is taken from my game-book:

October 4th.—Cock grouse, 25½ oz. Grits, 170 grains weight.

October 21st.—Cock grouse, 25½ oz. Grits, 103 grains weight.

October 21st.—Hen grouse, 22½ oz. Grits, 95 grains weight.

October 21st.—Hen grouse, 22 oz. Grits, 50 grains weight.

November 15th.—Hen grouse, 22 oz. Grits, 80 grains weight.

November 15th.—Hen grouse, 21¼ oz. Grits, 77 grains weight.

December 6th.—Cock grouse, 25 oz. Grits, 109 grains weight.

December 6th.—Hen grouse, 18 oz. Grits, 85 grains weight.

Crop contents of cock grouse shot on December 6th consisted of heather shoots and seeds, a few grass seed-heads, and one strand of sheep's wool. Weight of crop contents, 1¾ oz.

Crop contents of hen grouse, killed same day,

consisted of heather shoots and seeds, grass seed-heads, blaeberry stems and buds, plus two strands of sheep's wool.

Birds shot towards evening have full crops, whereas those killed in the morning have their crops nearly empty, the food picked up during the day being passed direct to the gizzard for pulping and digesting.

Grouse pick up hawthorn berries from under the trees, the berries being found in their crops, and the stones in their gizzards. In very hard weather grouse sometimes perch in the hawthorns to get at the berries, but not being perchers by nature, their attempts to keep their balance are somewhat ludicrous.

When first you begin grouse shooting, you will be well advised if you can manage it, to go out alone and see what you can do in the way of shooting over a pointer or setter, or, failing that, stalking the places where you think birds are likely to be. The latter method will pay you best if your shoot is of the rough variety, with a bit of heather here and there, and some hillside allotments.

In parts of Scotland grouse lie well to dogs throughout the season, but south of the Border

they are less accommodating, except perhaps very early in the season.

If, prior to your initial attempts at the grouse you have had previous experience of partridge driving, you will be capable of more or less keeping your end up at a grouse drive. You may have found the partridge a fast bird, but you will discover that the grouse is faster, being heavier. Weight tells a tale as regards speed of flight, thus blackgame, which weigh pounds, can overtake and pass grouse, which only weigh ounces. When shooting driven grouse you get all sorts of chances. You may be in a butt from which you can see the drive developing in the distance, or you may be not far from a ridge over which the birds suddenly appear like magic, only to disappear as quickly.

If you have tried your hand at impromptu grouse driving on a rough shoot, you will be interested in experiencing the more orthodox manœuvres on a real moor. You will do well to remember one or two things when you take part in a day's grouse driving. Don't talk whilst going to your butt, and don't try to hold converse with your neighbour when you get there. Wear neutral tinted hat and clothing,

and above all *stand still*, for oncoming grouse are quick to spot movement. If you keep fidgeting about and wiping your nose with a glaring white handkerchief, you must expect to see birds swerve off and pass over your neighbour's butts instead of yours.

Although the actual shooting from a butt is more difficult than over dogs, the latter provides a combination of hunting and shooting that will most certainly appeal to you if you watch the work of your canine helpers. It will also afford you plenty of exercise, and make you feel that you have earned every bird in the bag at the end of the day. On the rough shoot, especially if it is really hilly ground, and you stalk your grouse, you will have to work even harder than you would when shooting over a pointer or setter. With a retriever to help you find dead or wounded birds, you take advantage of every bit of cover in the shape of knolls, gullies, and the like, peering over or round at all the places where grouse are likely to be. This sort of shooting will keep you constantly on tension, because you never quite know when birds will rise, and you nearly always have to shoot quickly.

It is quite exhilarating to go out after grouse on a rough shoot when snow has fallen. The walking is then apt to be tiresome, but the beauty of the scene, and the many interesting tracks and trails you come across, make it well worth while. In snow you are pretty sure to find where grouse have jugged or spent the night. A series of depressions will mark the spot, each little hollow lying apart from its neighbour, because grouse do not jug close together like partridges. You will find, too, the footprints of grouse, as well as the imprints of their wing feathers where they have alighted in the snow. If you have a few hares on your ground the snow will enable you to do some tracking, and so add one or two to the bag.

Turning from grouse to blackgame, we are dealing with much larger birds. An adult blackcock may tip the scales at something over 4 lb., but in my experience with birds in the north of England, the average old cock weighs between 3 lb. and 4 lb., and the female, or greyhen, between 2 lb. and 3 lb. Some weights from my game-book are as follows: Blackcock, $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb. (August); blackcock, 2 lb. 14 oz. (September); blackcock, 2 lb. $14\frac{1}{4}$ (October); blackcock, 2 lb.

10¼ oz. (December). Greyhen, 2 lb. 2¾ oz. (September); greyhen, 2 lb. (September); greyhen, 2 lb. (October); greyhen, 2 lb. ½ oz. (December).

The greyhen lays from eight to ten eggs, these being buff colour, speckled with reddish brown. The red grouse's eggs are pale olive, spotted and blotched with dark red-brown.

Whilst the plumage of both sexes in the case of the grouse and partridge is more or less alike, there is a great contrast between that of the blackcock and greyhen. The former is black or blue-black, and the latter speckled brown. The blackcock has a lyre-shaped tail, while that of the greyhen is square. The fully-developed tail of an adult blackcock exhibits beautiful curves.

Blackgame are by nature perching birds, and they find a great deal of their food in the trees.

When quite young the blackcock is marked something like the greyhen, but by about the legal opening of the shooting season, i.e., August 20th—a date really far too early for blackgame shooting to begin—the young bird starts to put on the dark plumage of the adult male. This gives the young cock a very patched appearance, and he does not become really whole-coloured until

AN OLD BLACKCOCK

COUNTY

about the first week in October. Even then the crown of his head exhibits some brown markings, while his throat is marked with white, these brown and white bars being in evidence throughout the winter. In his third season the young cock's plumage becomes perfect, and his tail assumes its complete proportions. The blackcock moults about the middle of July and loses his tail.

Being polygamous, the blackcock does battle with others of his kind for a harem of greyhens. He and his kind foregather to fight, and make love at certain places known as "playing grounds." In March the sexual instinct begins to stir in the blackcock, and you will then hear him uttering his musical call. This cry may be written "whirroo! whirroo-o! whirroo-o!" with a gradually rising inflection, and an emphasis on the last "oo." This cry is quite pleasing, and can be heard from a considerable distance. It sounds not unlike water rippling over stones. The call is repeated three times, and before he begins it, the bird erects and spreads his curled tail, and trails the primary feathers of his wings. He then steps slowly and sedately along, calling as he goes. Not being armed with formidable spurs like the cock

pheasant, the blackcock uses his wings and beak when he fights. There is a good deal of bluff and bluster about the battles, and fatal encounters seldom occur. In between the fighting intervals the blackcock utters a most unmusical screech. Fighting may take place before the arrival on the scene of the greyhens, but directly a hen appears the "scrapping" ceases. All the cocks then begin jumping up and down in the most comical manner, screeching their cat-like "Kea-wee! Kea-wee!" for all they are worth. By degrees the greyhens are absorbed in the various harems.

In early May fertile greyhens are busy nesting, any hens then seen on the "playing grounds" being barren birds. I have seen three greyhens on a "playing ground" as late as May 17th.

Blackcocks utter thin whirroo-calls at times other than spring. I have seen a blackcock strutting and calling in October, and once I watched one in a birch tree in December, attempting to strut and call whilst balanced on a slender branch.

Blackgame are great gourmets, believe in a very varied menu, and change their ground in order to indulge their taste for good things. Of

the great variety of food which blackgame eat, the berries of the mountain ash are in my experience preferred by them to anything else.

In order to illustrate the varieties of food eaten by blackgame, I append a list of crop and gizzard contents taken from my game-book.

September 8th.—Greyhen, 2 lb. weight. Gizzard contents: quartz grits and 43 hard seeds of hawthorn berries. Weight of grits, 120 grains; weight of seeds, 73 grains; total weight, 193 grains. Crop contents: nearly all yellow flower heads of hawk's beard, about 20 heather tips, some crowfoot and sorrel leaves, and a few small seeds. Weight of crop contents, 2 oz. Bird shot at dusk.

September 8th.—Greyhen, weight 1 lb. 14½ oz. Gizzard contents: 199 grains weight of quartz grit. Crop contents: chiefly heather tips, with some hawk's beard, small seeds, and sorrel leaves, plus remains of several dark coloured beetles. Weight of crop contents, ¾ oz. Bird shot early in the day.

September 22nd.—Blackcock (young), 2 lb. 13 oz. weight. Gizzard grits, 220 grains weight; 7 largest quartz grits, 10 grains weight. Crop

contents: 92 mountain ash berries, 15 large, yellow-striped caterpillars, 67 flower heads of hawk's beard, grass seeds, grass, rush seeds, bits of fine rush stem, very few heather tips, and one strand of sheep's wool. Bird shot in late evening.

September 24th.—Greyhen, 2 lb. 7 oz. weight; old bird and tough eating. Gizzard grits, 246 grains weight. Crop contents: 62 mountain ash berries, flower heads of hawk's beard, a large amount of heather tips, rush and grass seeds, some creeping crowfoot, and a few strands of sheep's wool. Weight of crop contents, $3\frac{1}{4}$ oz. Bird shot at dusk.

September.—Blackcock, 2 lb. $7\frac{1}{2}$ oz. weight. Gizzard grits, 239 grains weight. Crop contents: rush heads and seeds, 11 yellow-striped caterpillars, largest $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, 3 small, bright green caterpillars, largest 1 inch long. Weight of crop contents, 400 grains.

December 5th.—Greyhen, 2 lb. $\frac{1}{2}$ oz weight. Crop contents: some heather tips, the rest birch tips, buds, and catkins. There were 40 short lengths of birch twigs with catkins and buds attached to them; the rest of crop contents consisted of loose catkins, many of them whole,

and others broken. Bird shot in the snow, and flushed in a coppice wood.

Where crops have contained caterpillars, the latter were sometimes still alive. In time of snow blackgame resort to the woods and feed amongst the birch trees. In autumn, when the berries are ripe, you will find them amongst the rowans and blackthorns. Earlier in the season they visit the rush-beds, where they eat the seeds, search for sorrel, and the yellow flowers of hawk's beard. Then again you may find them on the heather, where they eat the young tips, pick up caterpillars, and devour heather beetles, if any of the latter are there. Some birds eat more heather than others, but none eat as much as grouse do.

The grits in the gizzards of blackgame are much larger than those used by grouse. A grouse's grits may weigh 120 grains, whereas those of a blackcock weigh over 200 grains. The grits always consist of quartz and other hard pebbles.

Blackgame will visit turnip and potato fields, and they will eat grain. They also devour ground berries such as those of the blaeberry, plus the stalks and buds of that plant.

You can shoot blackgame over dogs, by walking-up, driving, and stalking. Early in the season the broods lie well to a dog, and you can mop them up if so inclined. The only legitimate use for a dog then, however, is to enable you to get on terms with the old greyhens. It is wise to kill a percentage of these, and let the young birds take their places. Stalking likely places on and about the moor is quite good fun, as is stalking the birds with a miniature rifle when they are in the trees. If you kill a brace or two by this means you will have well earned them. Driving from October onwards provides the best sport, however. Blackgame are more difficult to drive than grouse, for once they have made up their minds to reach a given point they will go there despite hell and high water.

The flight of blackgame is much less fussy than that of grouse, and the birds appear to be travelling slower than they really are. As a matter of fact, they can give grouse a start, and then easily overtake and pass them, if they don't join the grouse, which is a habit of theirs.

CHAPTER VII

WOODCOCK, SNIPE, AND WILDFOWL

CHAPTER VII

WOODCOCK, SNIPE, AND WILDFOWL

When you are hunting up game on the rough shoot, you may chance to flush a woodcock. If you haven't killed one before, you will naturally be keen to add number one to the bag. Really good woodcock shooting is only to be found on certain favoured estates, although the majority of places harbour a few birds during the season. Most shooting men are eager to kill woodcock, and the cry: "Mark 'cock" at a covert shoot at once sets all the guns on the alert. This eagerness has, as a matter of fact, saved many a woodcock's life, for the man who can shoot quite coolly at other game may be in too much of a hurry when he pulls trigger at a woodcock.

Rising in the open, a woodcock is not a difficult bird to kill, but in covert, when it dodges amongst the trees, it may require a quick snap-shot to

stop it. Ordinarily the bird's flight is rather owl-like, but in a wind it can hurtle along with the best, and it is an adept at swerving.

Woodcock are early nesters, and may be found sitting on eggs in March. The hen usually lays four eggs, these being placed in a slight hollow of the ground roughly lined with dead leaves. The period of incubation is about twenty-one days.

As regards plumage, male and female woodcock are alike, and dissection is the only true test of sex. The colour of the plumage varies considerably, some kinds being dark, some grey, and some chestnut. The latter are often larger birds than those more darkly marked.

The woodcock is not a big bird. Some weights of woodcock taken from my game-book are as follows: 14½ oz., woodcock shot in December on Achill Island, Ireland; 12 oz., shot in August, Westmorland, length of bird's bill 2¾ inches; 11½ oz., bill 2⅞ inches long, shot in November, Westmorland; 12½ oz., bill 2¾ inches, shot in November, Westmorland; 13 oz., shot in December, Westmorland; two woodcocks, 10¼ oz. and 10 oz., shot in September, Westmorland.

Although woodcock subsist chiefly on such soft

WOODCOCK

food as worms, they use grit in their gizzards like other game birds. The 14½ oz. woodcock shot on Achill Island had in its gizzard 13 complete spiral shells and some broken bits, plus 6 quartz grits. The shells were about ⅜ inch long. The bird was killed near the Keel Lake.

It is now a well-ascertained fact that woodcock carry their young holding them between their thighs with their feet. I have on two occasions seen woodcock doing this.

Woodcock may be found practically anywhere from the woods to the open moor. They are fond of lying amongst bracken, and the birch-fringed ghylls on the hill-sides are favourite places. A certain bush, such as a holly, or a particular clump of heather, may be the regular resort of a woodcock. I have flushed birds from heather clumps which showed signs of long occupation.

Where large numbers of woodcock resort to the coverts, the latter can be driven specially for woodcock. At most covert shoots a woodcock or two find their way into the bag. Where woodcock inhabit glens and ghylls they can be best accounted for by walking-up. The same applies to the rough shoot, but if you are out after

woodcock single-handed, a close ranging spaniel will be found of great assistance in working the thick places.

Woodcock fly from their daily resting-places to their feeding grounds at dusk. If you note the time at which a woodcock passes a certain point when en route to feed, you will see the bird at the same spot and time on successive evenings. The first woodcock I shot was brought down with a single barrel muzzle-loading gun as it was leaving a covert at dusk. Where a wood has soft, marshy ground and a stream through it, woodcock may both rest and feed there, otherwise they flight to suitable feeding ground.

Like snipe, woodcock probe for worms, etc., with their long, sensitive bills. If you live in a district where woodcock breed, you will see the birds flitting about at dusk, and hear them uttering a curious croaking sound.

After you have shot a woodcock you will find in each wing a small, stiff "pin-feather." If you collect a sufficient number of these you can make them up into quite a neat hat mount. These small feathers measure from about 1 inch to $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length. Half a dozen measurements of "pin-feathers" from my game-book are as

follows: $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches, $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches, $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

The "pin-feathers" from a snipe's wings measure about $\frac{7}{8}$ inch long.

Woodcock often lie very close, thus it pays to beat out every yard of covert and undergrowth, otherwise some birds are sure to be left behind. During a period of hard weather woodcock may leave their inland quarters and migrate to the coast, from whence they will return when a thaw sets in. Indications of the presence of woodcock are white "splashes," holes made by the birds' bills in soft ground, and tracks. The foot of the woodcock makes a very neat imprint. Both woodcock and snipe bore for food in the droppings of cattle.

Turning from woodcock to snipe, we find the latter much smaller birds. Some weights of snipe from my game-book are: $3\frac{1}{2}$ oz., $3\frac{1}{2}$ oz., 4 oz. (bill $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches), 4 oz.

These weights refer to common snipe. The other snipe found in this country are the jack-snipe and the great or solitary snipe. The latter is a comparatively rare bird, whereas the jack and the common snipe are to be met with nearly everywhere. Jack-snipe weigh about

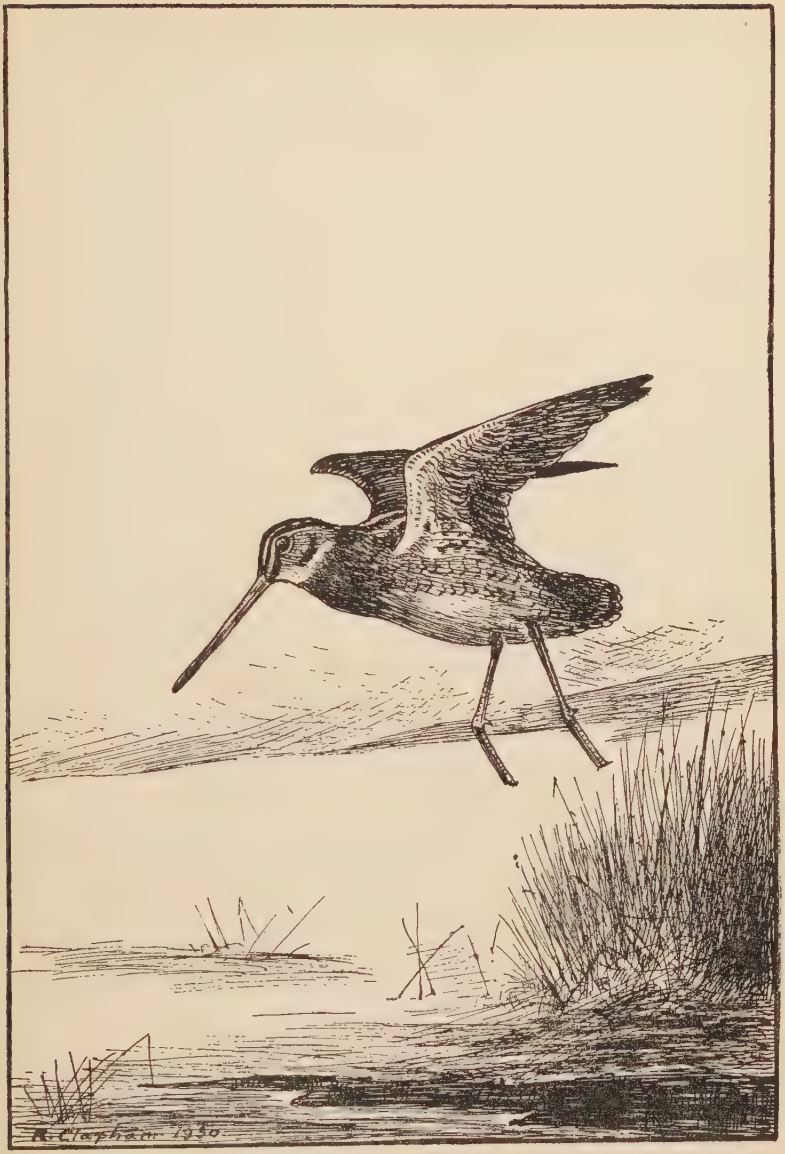
2 oz., and great snipe 6 oz. or more. The jack has twelve tail-feathers, the great snipe sixteen, and the common snipe fourteen. Jack-snipe are often, but not always, flushed singly. The great snipe singly or in pairs. Common snipe may be met with singly or in large numbers.

The common snipe lays four eggs, the nesting period beginning at the end of March or in early April. The eggs are well hidden in a tuft of grass or other herbage. They are olive coloured, blotched with dark brown.

If you visit a district where snipe breed, you will hear the birds drumming in spring. When a snipe drums it flies downwards at a sharp angle with its tail spread. The two outer feathers in the tail are stiff, and differ in shape from the others. The drumming sound is caused by the air rushing past these stiff feathers. If you hold one of these stiff feathers between your finger and thumb and swing your arm sharply downwards, the drumming sound is produced.

Snipe feed both by day and night. Like woodcock they leave white "splashes," and bore holes in soft ground and cattle droppings.

When you try your 'prentice hand at snipe shooting, you will probably find the birds difficult



SNIPE

to hit. A snipe has a most erratic zigzag flight, and it requires a certain knack to kill a good percentage of the birds you shoot at. The time of year and the weather influence the flight of snipe. When out after grouse in August you may get chances at snipe that are quite easy, whereas later in the season, with severe weather, nearly every shot will be a difficult one.

Because snipe breed on your ground, that does not necessarily mean that you will find them there when the shooting season opens. On part of a hill shoot which I have had for years, snipe breed regularly, but it is an exception to find one there after September. On another low-lying shoot, snipe breed and are present in greater or less numbers right through the shooting season. In autumn a certain number of foreign snipe help to swell the ranks of the home-bred birds. There are certain places, perhaps a rush-fringed puddle or a damp spot in a grass field, from which a snipe can nearly always be flushed. If you shoot it another bird seems to take its place directly.

Snipe may lie right on their feeding ground, such, for example, as a heather covered "moss," or they may rest in bare grass pastures some distance from where they go to feed. Being

erratic in their comings and goings, it will pay you to get after them directly you know they are there in numbers. Snipe rise against the wind, and it generally pays to walk up-wind when snipe shooting, but no hard and fast rules can be laid down, as local conditions with regard to boundaries, etc., may influence the way in which you work your ground.

Where snipe are plentiful, and will lie, they can be shot over a pointer or setter. They can also, given suitable conditions, be driven. Walking-up is, however, the usual method of getting on terms with them. A dog that will retrieve snipe is almost essential, as dead birds are often difficult to find, no matter how carefully you try to mark their fall.

Where you expect to shoot nothing but snipe, small shot like No. 7 and No. 8 is perhaps best, but if other game is likely to be met with, such as grouse or duck, No. 5 or No. 6 will pay better.

On an inland shoot there may be a greater or less number of wild duck and teal, these being wild-bred birds. On many estates, too, duck are hand-reared in numbers, and are put over the guns in the same manner as pheasants. On the coast you get flight-shooting at duck, and the

same may apply to an extensive inland marsh. Wild duck visit all sorts of places, such as streams, ditches, backwaters and the like, and if you are in the vicinity of these spots at dusk or dawn you are likely to get some shooting. Teal and wild duck rest by day and feed at night. The mallard is an omniverous feeder, and will eat anything from grain and acorns to grass. Teal feed to a great extent on water insects.

If your ground provides feeding places for duck you can lie in wait for them as they come in to feed at dusk. Should the place contain water to which duck resort for rest, then you can wait for them as they return at daybreak from their night's foraging expedition. A dog that will retrieve is essential for duck shooting, as killed birds may fall in deep water, and wounded ones are adepts at hiding themselves in all sorts of holes and corners. Where mallard and teal breed on the shoot they afford some sport early in the season, and home-bred duck are sure to bring others with them when they return to their old haunts in winter. A river may afford sport with duck. When looking for them, unless the cover on the banks is thick, approach the water at intervals, and do not walk straight up or down.

A bend in the stream is always a likely spot, and so are the pools. In hard weather duck resort to springs and running water, such places being worth visiting during a severe frost.

It pays to put down food in the shape of grain, acorns, potatoes, etc., at places where duck resort to feed, and by leaving these spots quiet for some time, more and more birds are likely to be attracted. On a large area of suitable ground containing ponds or lakes, duck can be driven, but the usual methods of shooting inland places are walking-up and flighting.

Duck and teal both call for straight shooting, especially in a wind. The mallard is a faster bird than the teal because it is heavier. A wild duck shot in August weighed 25¾ oz., and two teal 10¼ oz. and 9¼ oz. respectively. Teal when flushed have a habit of rising straight up in the air, and it is quite easy to shoot underneath them.

WILD DUCK

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CHAPTER VIII

WOODPIGEONS AND "VARIOUS"

CHAPTER VIII

WOODPIGEONS AND "VARIOUS"

AMONGST the list of creatures which come under the "various" column in the game-book are woodpigeons, golden and green plover, moorhens, landrail, and vermin. You do not go out purposely to shoot the latter, except perhaps in spring if you have a rough shoot of your own, but you should make a point of killing stoats, hawks, magpies, etc., whenever they present themselves within shot, either on your own shoot or your host's. Keepers cannot clean everything up in the way of vermin, and every little helps to reduce the ranks of furred and feathered marauders.

Where you have woods, there as a rule will you have pigeons, often in such hordes that the farmers are only too glad for you to shoot all you possibly can. In arable country pigeons will go for the early sown spring corn, and before and after harvest they visit the grain fields.

Winter finds them in the root fields, and in autumn they fill their crops with acorns and beech-mast, plus various berries such as those of the elder.

Before the grain is harvested you can take up your position behind a hedge or on the edge of the standing corn, and wait for pigeons coming in to feed. After harvest, with bare fields, you must build a "hide" of some sort from which to shoot. In hot weather a "hide" made of green branches soon withers, and pigeons quickly notice the difference between it and the natural green of the hedges. Let your "hide," therefore, be as inconspicuous as possible, and your clothing likewise.

Having killed a few pigeons, prop them up in as natural a position as you can with forked twigs, and remember to set them out head to wind. Early morning and late afternoon are the best times to make a bag. Vary the position of your "hide," or rather have several, for pigeons become wary of any spot where danger threatens.

Artificial decoys can be used in trees, as well as on the ground, but a live decoy or decoys usually prove the most attractive. The live bird is confined by a strap or string harness, which

WOODPIGEON

allows the pigeon to raise its wings freely. To the harness is fastened a cord which leads to the shooter's "hide." This cord passes over an inclined forked stick. The cord is sufficiently slack to allow the pigeon room to walk about. By pulling on the cord the bird can be raised from the ground, causing it to flap its wings. The flapping acts as an "all clear" signal to incoming pigeons, which sail right up and afford close shooting. Dead decoys can be used in conjunction with the live pigeon or pigeons.

Besides shooting woodpigeons coming in to feed, you can have sport with them when they are going to roost in the coverts. A windy evening is best, as the birds then fly lower and offer more frequent chances. Pigeons coming down-wind always turn and swing back up-wind before alighting.

Other birds, like hawks and magpies, can often be shot whilst waiting for pigeons in the late evening.

In grass country pigeons feed on different fare to those which inhabit arable land. A woodpigeon shot in August in a grazing district of Yorkshire, had in its crop: trefoil leaves, a lot of small seeds, and a dozen or more berries.

The latter were those of daphne mezereum, with four seeds in each berry. The bird was killed in an avenue close to the house, and rose from amongst an extensive growth of common avens.

Other pigeons shot later in the season not far from the same spot, had in their crops elder berries, beech-mast, and acorns. Clover leaves were also frequently found in crops, and ivy berries are often eaten.

In spring and summer when the leaf is on the trees, pigeons can be shot with a miniature rifle in covert. I have killed a fair number in this way when quietly pottering about the woods.

Both peewits and golden plover afford quite good shooting, especially the "goldies." They can be got by flight shooting, stalking, and driving. Golden plover come very fast. Green plover fly higher, and their flight in a strong wind is often most erratic. Years ago in Yorkshire, accompanied by a brother gun, I spent days after peewits in the big grass fields. The stone walls afforded cover for a stalk, so that one gun made a careful approach while the other took a stand over which it was likely the birds would fly when disturbed. We killed a lot of birds, but I would hate to say how many miles we

MAGPIE

walked after them. Golden plover bred on all the moors round the district, and occasionally during the shooting season we got chances at flocks of "goldies" which visited the low-lying meadows and pastures. The golden plover is a typical moorland bird, and its mournful whistle seems to fit naturally into the wild surroundings where the bird makes its home.

Other birds which afford shots from time to time are curlews, moorhens, and water-rails. The latter are far from common, but I have shot them occasionally when out after snipe. Moorhens are common enough wherever there is water, and as they do damage to trout spawn their ranks are best kept in subjection. In August, when grouse shooting starts, a curlew or two may find their way into the bag. Young birds bred on the moor are not bad eating, but when they have lived on the coast for a bit are not to be recommended.

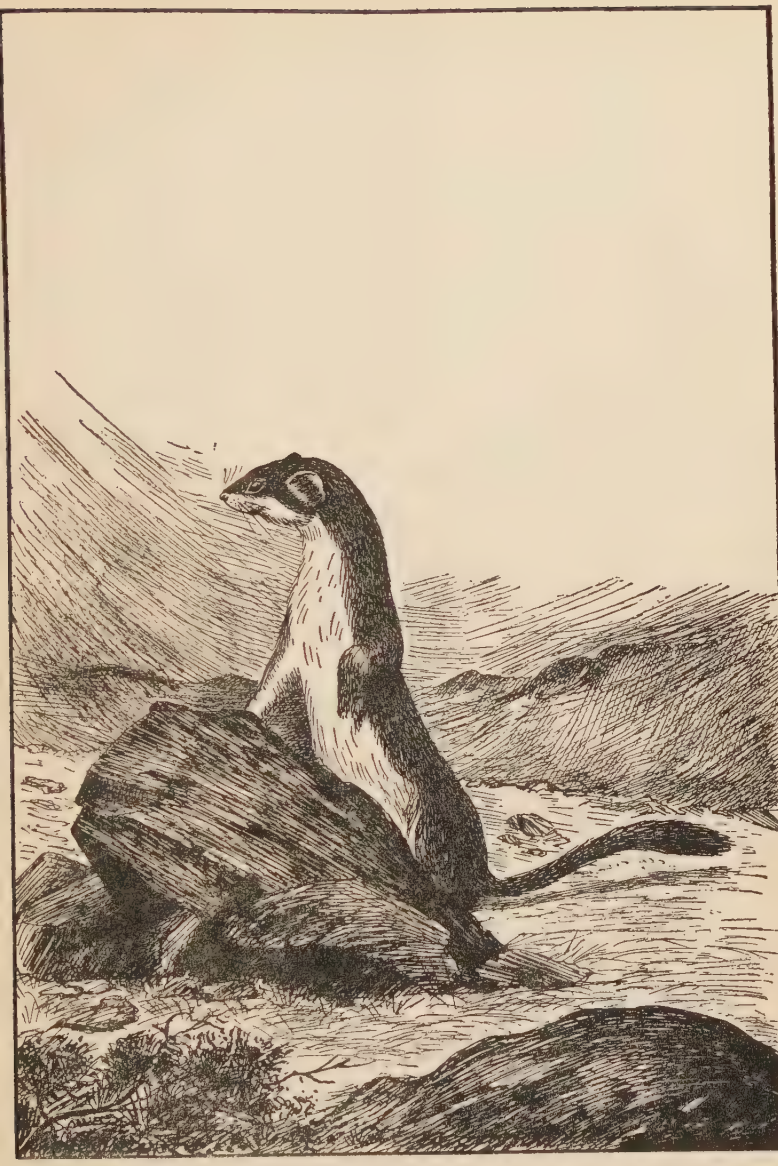
A curlew shot in August had in its gizzard: grass seeds, hard parts of beetles, plus 26 pieces of big and little grit. Weight of grits: 19 grains. The bird was a female, and its bill was $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long.

A wild duck shot in September had 10

grains weight of grit, consisting of very small, bluish pebbles, almost like dust. In addition there were 19 quartz pebbles, about the size of those in the gizzard of a grouse.

Some measurements and weights of stoats are as follows: Female stoat, shot in December. Weight, 11 oz. Nose to tail-tip, 16 inches. Tail, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches to end of long hairs. Height at shoulder, 4 inches. It was carrying a field vole when I shot it.

Female stoat, shot in December on top of a stone wall. Nose to tail-tip, $14\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Tail, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Black tip to tail, $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Weight, $7\frac{3}{4}$ oz.



STOAT

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CHAPTER IX

DEER

CHAPTER IX

DEER

Sooner or later in your shooting career you may get an invitation for a few days' deer-stalking. If you do, you will find yourself in the hands of a professional stalker who will take you up to a stag, hand you the rifle, and expect you to do the rest. Possibly you may have already killed deer on sheep ground, and know a bit about the business. If you have, you will be able to take an intelligent interest in the professional's plans and manœuvres. Should you not understand every move in the game, question him and he will give you his reasons for all that he does. You will be placed in charge of a stalker because the ground is unfamiliar to you, and if you were allowed to work your will alone, you would probably end by needlessly disturbing all the deer on the place. The professional knows every hole and corner of his own beat, the way in which the wind blows and eddies at certain

points, and whether it is possible to approach within shot of deer according to the conditions at the time. As you are quite unfamiliar with all this, you can realize how easily you would make a mess of things if allowed to tackle the job alone.

Of course, if you have access to, or are able to rent sheep ground on which there are a few stags, you can try your hand at stalking by yourself. You will probably make some mistakes and lose deer that you should really have got, but you will be getting experience all the time and enjoy your successes all the more because they will be gained entirely off your own bat. One stag fairly found and stalked single-handed, is, in my humble opinion, worth half a dozen shot whilst in charge of a professional.

Before you can shoot a stag you require a rifle. The latter should be a good one, and should fit you quite as well as your shotgun. You have the choice of a magazine rifle, a single barrel, or a double barrel. The latter will prove expensive, for it is only the really well-built double that shoots exactly alike with both barrels and the same sighting. The double barrel is heavier too than the single, and weight tells a

tale if you are your own stalker and have to carry the rifle all day. If you are in the hands of a professional stalker, he will carry the rifle until the time comes to use it, so that weight does not then matter, at any rate to you. A single rifle can be quickly reloaded, but a "right and left" can be fired with the double in the time it takes to load the single. Personally speaking, after a good many years' stalking single-handed both at home and abroad, I prefer a magazine rifle with an under-lever action such as that on the Winchester and Savage. This is purely a personal preference, however, and in all probability you will be well advised to buy a good double rifle if you can afford it, otherwise a single. After some experience you will then be able to decide matters for yourself.

Modern rifles develop high velocities with consequent flat trajectories over the first 250 yards of range, so that distance judging is practically eliminated for all ranges at which you are likely to shoot at deer. A rifle like the ·280 Ross develops a muzzle velocity of about 3,000 feet per second, while the ·240 does the same. The ·250 Savage is another of like kidney. The ·303 and ·256 will both kill deer handily, but

they are outclassed by the aforementioned weapons as far as flat trajectory is concerned.

With regard to a magazine rifle, either of bolt-action or under-lever type, some people object to them because the reloading for a second shot makes sufficient noise to give away the shooter's position. Personally, I have not found this so when deer-stalking. If you work the bolt or lever the instant you have fired the first shot, the report of the latter tends to drown the slight sound of reloading and you are ready to shoot again instantly. In the case of running deer, five cartridges in the magazine may enable you to drop your stag when perhaps you might miss with both barrels of a double. I well remember one day when prowling round some rough moor-land ground not far from a large covert, I spotted a hind feeding amongst some willows. A convenient hollow let me get close to her, and my first shot broke her neck at a range of less than twenty yards. As she fell, four other hinds suddenly appeared, three of which dropped to the next three shots, and I missed the fifth beast as she went off. Had I been armed with a single or a double rifle I should certainly not have been able to kill more than one or two out of the lot.

I *might* have stopped the fifth hind with a second or third bullet as I had ten cartridges in the magazine of the Winchester I was using, but I thought four were quite plenty to drag down to where a cart could fetch them. This was in a district in the north of England where deer are plentiful in the woods; and do a considerable amount of damage. A farmer whose oat fields had been raided by deer was very pleased to see four of them brought to book.

As to sights for the rifle, there are various patterns on the market. The fore sight I personally prefer is a gold bead, and the rear sight a flat-topped one, or with a very shallow V. The perfectly flat-topped sight is hard to beat for quick shooting, because the eye automatically takes the exact centre of the bar. For running shots a rear aperture sight is useful. It should have a wide aperture and not a pin-hole as used for target shooting. You can dispense with the ordinary rear sight altogether when using the aperture sight. You simply place the fore sight where you want it in relation to the animal or object you are shooting at, and at the same time look through the aperture sight, but pay no attention to it. There is no need to centre the bead

in the aperture, and the aperture sight becomes as invisible as if it was not there. As an all-round sight it is very hard to beat.

When aiming with a bead fore sight and, say, a shallow bar rear sight, the same aim should be taken every time. Using a high velocity rifle, no allowance need be made for range up to 250 yards, for the bullet will strike only three inches below the line of sight at that distance. Always try to hold the rifle so that it does not cant to one side. If it does, the shot will strike low. Get accustomed to taking the same sight every time, and shoot quick, without dwelling.

In addition to your rifle and cartridges you require a telescope or field-glasses, and a knife.

For long range work on the open hill, where you want to count the points on a stag's horns, a telescope beats field-glasses hollow. The latter are of low power with a wide field of view, whereas the telescope is a more powerful instrument with a smaller field of view. For a rapid survey of a given area of country binoculars are excellent. With them you can pick up deer quickly enough, but there are times you may see something the identity of which is doubtful. Here is where the telescope with its higher power

and clear definition comes in. The binoculars may tell you that deer are there, and that a stag is amongst them, but it takes the telescope to reveal the character of the stag's head and the number of points he carries. For use in this uncertain climate of ours, a telescope of under rather than over twenty-five power proves most useful, say from fifteen to twenty. With the sun behind you a higher power can be used than when looking towards the sun. When spying in the latter direction, pull out the sun-shade, for if you don't the sun will flash on the object glass like a heliograph and glaringly advertise your position.

When spying for deer with the telescope, sit down and steady the glass against your walking-stick, or the rifle if you are not carrying a stick. The ground should be looked over methodically. Let each separate field of view overlap the other, and sweep the glass either horizontally or vertically. Visibility is constantly changing in the hills, and an object that may be in plain view one moment is perhaps difficult to pick up the next. Light and shadow play queer pranks on the hides of deer for example. Carry your telescope in a leather sling-case, and have your name or identification mark on it.

A six-power prismatic field-glass is about right. With it you get a wide field of view and plenty of luminosity, which means that the glass is useful in a poor light. Glasses can be carried in your pocket, where they are quickly get-at-able when stalking. In and about woods, field-glasses are more useful than the telescope, as you pick up deer at much shorter ranges than on the open hill. Field-glasses are quickly focused. When using a telescope mark your usual focus by a scratch on the focusing draw. Keep both eyes open when spying, and learn to spy with either eye, so as to rest the right eye, which is the one you use most.

If you do any stalking single-handed you will have to gralloch your deer. For this you don't require a huge couteau de chasse. A sharp pocket-knife will do at a pinch, but if you use a folding knife it is as well to have one with a lock back to prevent the blade from closing on your hand. Personally, I like a knife with a softish steel blade, as it is easier to sharpen with a bit of carborundum stone than a highly tempered blade. I have a very useful all metal folding knife made by Holtzapffel & Co., which is easily washed and kept clean. With

it I have gralloched a good many stags and hinds.

When stalking deer with a professional stalker, the latter carries the rifle in its case. If a case is used it should be a quite loose fit so that it can be whipped off quickly. Personally, when out after deer single-handed I do not carry a rifle-case. You never know when you may get a quick shot, and a case is only a nuisance. In the same way with a stick. If the professional carries the rifle you will find a stick useful, but if you are out alone the rifle is quite enough to carry, especially during the actual stalk.

While red deer are provided with good noses, their eyesight is nothing remarkable. On this account you must pay due attention to the wind and not give yourself away by scent. Deer can be approached up-wind or on a side wind, and sometimes down-wind if they are on a steep face with the wind blowing clean over them. They usually watch the ground below them, and seldom look up-hill unless suspicious of danger. It pays, therefore, when possible, to stalk them from above. Wind acts queerly on the hills, all sorts of air currents being formed, and the breeze may be deflected in any direction. In wild weather

deer are uneasy and travel far if disturbed. During fine weather, when the flies are bad, they retire to the high tops to escape their tormentors.

In a deer forest proper you will find large herds of deer, and when stalking you may have to get round or move other beasts before you can get at your chosen stag. On sheep ground the stags are generally found singly or in small lots, thus it is often easier to approach them on such ground than in a recognized forest. On the other hand, sheep may prove a nuisance, for deer are quick to take alarm from the movements of other creatures, such as foxes, hares, or grouse, which have been disturbed.

Stags cast their horns annually, generally in April. They seldom drop both antlers at the same spot. Some stags carry no horns, these beasts being known as "hummels." The latter are usually heavy animals, which, despite the fact that they have no headgear, generally win their battles against horned stags during the excitement of the rutting season. Next to the hornless or bald stag, comes the switch-horn. Really a "switch" should have no points at all, but usually carries brows. With age a stag's

A ROYAL

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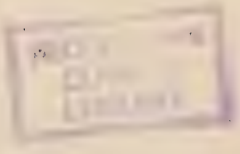


antlers begin to deteriorate, and he is then said to be "going back."

Once you have found your stag, the next thing is to plan out a suitable line of approach. Here is where the professional stalker on his own ground scores, because he knows every inch of it, and has probably stalked many a beast in the same position before, thus he recognizes all the landmarks and wastes little or no time in getting up to his stag. It all seems easy enough when you are crawling behind him, but when you try it by yourself you will probably find that the marks—such as a rock, knoll, etc.—that you picked out to guide you when you made your preliminary survey, look very different and are not so easy to locate when you are actually making your approach. In other words, you get a bird's-eye view of the ground between you and your stag when you first pick him up with the glass, but when you are on a level with your chosen marks, your view is greatly circumscribed. To relocate your route takes time, and time when you are stalking is precious, if you wish to kill more than one stag during the course of the day.

The ease or otherwise with which you can get in to a stag depends on the wind and the con-

formation of the ground. If the latter affords plenty of cover you may have very little actual crawling to do. On the other hand, in open ground you may have to creep along as flat as a fluke, your rate of progress being an inch or two at a time. When your stag looks up, you freeze into immobility, then when he turns his head away you cover a few more feet or yards. A stag is quick to spot movement, but if you are inconspicuously clothed he may stare at you for a long time without becoming alarmed, provided you keep perfectly still. Clothes for stalking should be of some neutral colour, which will become decidedly more neutral after you have worn them on the hill for a time. Whatever you do have your boots or shoes well nailed, because a slip on steep ground may mean a bad fall, with consequent damage to both yourself and the rifle.

With regard to the latter, before you start on your first day's stalking, try the weapon at a target to see that it is sighted properly. If you have time, some practice at stones and other marks on the hill-side will prove useful, especially if you shoot from different positions. You can't always pick an easy position when you are within shot of a stag, so accustom yourself to

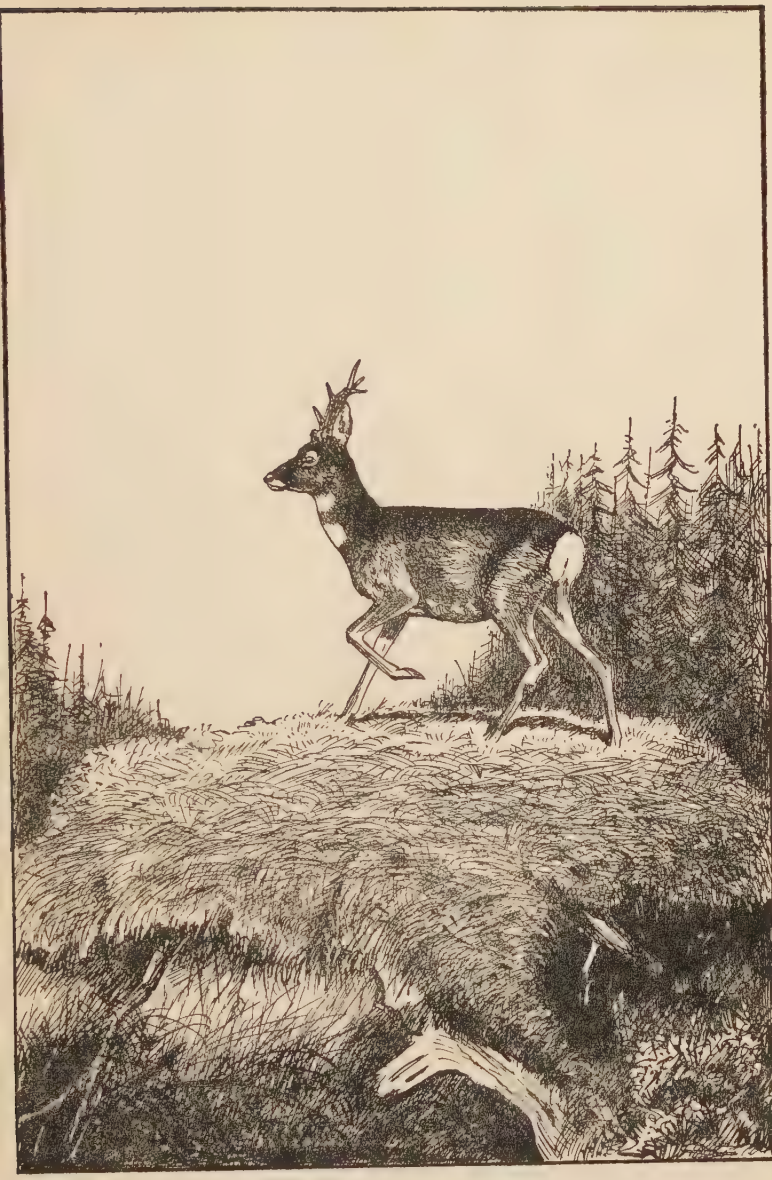
the possible exigencies of the hill. You may get a chance at a cantering or galloping stag, and you certainly should take it. This, of course, means shooting from the shoulder without a rest. If your stag is crossing and travelling fast, you must make some forward allowance.

A stag shot through the heart will usually gallop some distance before he falls with a crash. With a broken foreleg, a stag will travel up-hill rather than down, but if a hind-leg be broken he will avoid the hill. Should your bullet graze the point of his shoulder, the back of his head or the base of a horn, he may drop as if struck by lightning. This is a sure sign that he is only stunned, and you should get to him as soon as possible and finish him off, otherwise he will quickly recover. A stunned stag or a wounded one that still shows signs of life, no matter how feeble, is best finished by a shot through the neck. If you use the knife you may get into trouble should the beast struggle. A blow from his horns or his feet may send the knife into you, so keep on the safe side and put another bullet where it will do the most good.

If you get a chance to go hind stalking after the stag season is over, take it. Hinds don't

provide trophies in the shape of antlers, but they afford plenty of good sport. If you happen to be stalking in the vicinity of woods, you will get chances at both stags and hinds when they leave the coverts to feed in the open towards evening, and in the early morning before they retire to the coverts again. In the woods there may be wild fallow deer, and there are pretty sure to be some roe deer. The latter are small animals, a buck weighing about 40 lb. and a doe 30 lb. The buck carries a small but pretty head. An average roe head will measure from 7 inches to 9 inches, the brow point being about 2 inches. The roebuck casts his horns in December, and grows a new set by late spring. The majority of roe deer are killed with shotguns when the woods are being driven, but by far the best sport is to stalk them with a rifle when they are out feeding in the open.

Strict attention should be paid to the cleaning of a rifle, because the bore is grooved, and the rifling attracts more rust than a smooth bore. Boiling water is essential in the preliminary stage, after which some good oil should be left in the barrel. Before firing the rifle again, the oil should be wiped out. A little petrol on a



A ROEBUCK

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rag will dissolve the oil and leave the bore quite clean. An oily barrel is a cause of inaccuracy, as the resistance offered to the bullet in its passage down the bore is varied, and thus the shooting of the rifle becomes inconsistent. An oily bullet may lead to a blow-back, and should the latter occur, muzzle velocity is decreased and accuracy is lost.